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Mr. HOLT. Mr. Chairman, I rise today to express my support for the Fannie Lou Hamer, Rosa Parks, and Coretta Scott King Voting Rights Act Reauthorization and Amendments Act of 2006, which will reauthorize expiring provisions of one of the most important and effective civil rights bills in the history of the United States. Passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 marked a pivotal turning point in American history, and I urge my colleagues to join me in supporting its extension for another 25 years.

As honored as I am to be a part of reauthorizing this landmark legislation, I am to the same extent disheartened that it remains necessary. Would that we could say, the 41-year anniversary of the legislation having come and gone, that 40 years had been enough to cure all of our electoral ills. But clearly it has not been enough, and it pains me deeply to have to look at my own country and acknowledge that some of its electoral abuses, although perhaps less overt, are at least as bad today as they were in 1965, if not worse.

I wish to commend the Judiciary Committee, Subcommittee on the Constitution for its exhaustive inquiry into the effectiveness of and continuing necessity for the expiring provisions of the Voting Rights Act. Through this process, which was informed by elected officials, scholars, attorneys, representatives of the civil rights and election integrity community, the Department of Justice, other governmental organizations and private citizens, we can all be assured that we extend these critical voting protection measures for unquestionably just cause.

The Judiciary Committee's report on the inquiry is compelling. Since 1982, for example, under the Voting Rights Act section 5 pre-clearance procedures, the Department of Justice has successfully screened out more than 700 proposed election procedure changes that were discriminatory. The rejected proposals included objectionable practices like discriminatory redistricting plans, relocating of polling places making elected positions appointed positions, and other such techniques. In fact, before the subcommittee even commenced its hearings in 2005, I co-moderated a day-long election reform forum in December 2004. Sponsored by the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights, Common Cause, and the Century Foundation, the forum documented extensive and ongoing disenfranchisement activities. It was entitled "Voting in 2004: A Report to the Nation on America's Election Process," and the reports delivered by election reform experts and civil rights groups are still available on the Common Cause website.

It is important to note, however, that the last 40 years have not been a bad-news only story. The Judiciary Committee's report documents both the continuing shortcomings of our electoral system and improvements made to it by the Voting Rights Act. It shows that the Voting Rights Act has been effective, but much work remains to be done. For example, between 1965 and 1988, the gap between registration of White voters and Black voters in Mississippi narrowed from 63.2 to 6.3 percent, and from 50 to 7.4 percent in North Carolina. Similar increases in Black registration were experienced throughout the States covered by section 5 during that period. Meanwhile, the number of African-American elected officials has increased from 1,469 in 1970,

to over 9,000 in the year 2,000. Over the period from 1978 to 2004, the number of Asian-Americans elected to office has more than doubled.

The statistics also show that much work remains. The Judiciary Committee also found that in each of six southern States covered by section 5--Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina and North Carolina--African-Americans make up 35 percent of the population but hold only 20.7 percent of the State legislative seats. Latinos represent the largest minority population in the United States, at 15 million residents, but occupy only 0.9 percent of the total number of elected offices in the country.

I believe that the greatest invention of humans is our system of Constitutional democracy. It has transformed not just America, but the world, demonstrating that peaceful and productive government by the consent of the governed is possible. That consent--the very cornerstone of the system--is given by the vote. We have demonstrated that majority rule with protections of minority rights and minority influence is possible. The Supreme Court has held that the right to vote is the most fundamental right, as it is preservative of all others. The measure before us which will assure the continued life of the Voting Rights Act in the decades to come--is of monumental importance.

I am also eager to continue the fight to improve the fairness, accuracy and integrity of our electoral system as soon as this historic measure passes. I hope my colleagues will rapidly work with me towards passage of my Voter Confidence and Increased Accessibility Act, H.R. 550, to ensure that all votes are not only counted as cast, but can independently be audited so that both the losing side--actually, especially the losing side--and the winning side can accept the electoral results. The legislation would require a voter-verified paper record of every vote cast and other things to ensure the reliability, auditability, an accessibility of the voting process.

In addition, and especially because the measure before us will eliminate the further use of Federal examiners to assist in assuring the accuracy, integrity and full inclusivity of voter registration lists, I hope my colleague will support me as I work to pass my Electoral Fairness Act, H.R. 4989, which will substantially enhance the protections afforded to voters under the Help America Vote Act and the National Voter Registration Act in connection with the voter registration process. The legislation would establish fair and uniform rules governing the casting and counting of provisional ballots; ensure that adequate staffing, equipment and supplies be equally available at all polling places to minimize wait times for all voters; and protect the accuracy, integrity and inclusiveness of the voter registration rolls.

I urge my colleagues to join me today in reauthorizing the Voting Rights Act, and committing themselves to working to preserve and advance its legacy in every possible manner.